



PARTNERSHIP FOR  
PUBLIC HEALTH

THINGS PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FLU SHOTS

By Alan S. Peterson, MD

We are already seeing flu in the area. It started early this year. That usually means that it is going to be a significant year for influenza. Each year the flu sickens millions, hospitalizes hundreds of thousands and kills tens of thousands.

I hope all of you know that you can spread the flu to others. This can occur even 2 days before you start to have any symptoms and even know that you are sick. Please note that there are some around you who cannot get the flu shot because of certain diseases they might already have, or because they are on certain medications. So if you get your flu shot you may prevent them from getting the flu. I believe that it is still taught that we should be thinking about our “fellow man”.

We should, as parents, know the following about the flu vaccine:

1. All infants and children greater than 6 months of age should get a flu shot. That is the best way to prevent the flu. This year’s flu shot is supposed to be a very good match with the strains of the flu that are now found in the country. Don’t forget to encourage hand washing, coughing into your arm (not your hand), and obviously staying away from sick people.
2. If you haven’t had the flu shot by now, get it as soon as possible. The flu season can run through April and some years even longer. The shot takes about 2 weeks to become effective.
3. Children less than 9 years of age that are getting the vaccine for the first time need 2 doses. These are given 1 month apart. If your child is younger than 9 and only got 1 dose last season, they will need 2 doses this season.
4. People with an egg allergy can get the flu shot. If the allergy is severe, talk to your doctor, but it is unlikely that anything will happen. Your doctor may want to keep your child monitored in the office a bit longer and have medications ready in the unlikely case of a significant allergic reaction.
5. If your child is less than 6 months of age, they cannot get the flu vaccine. But make sure parents, grandparents and other caretakers around that child get immunized. That helps the child with what we call “herd immunity”. In other words, those around the child, since they are immunized, have less of a chance of spreading the disease to the child. Anyone with a history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome should let their doctor know before they get the flu shot. If a child has a temperature over 100.4° most likely the medical provider will postpone the shot. Otherwise if it is just a minor illness like a cold, they can get the shot.

6. Those with highest risk of the flu, of course, are those with chronic diseases such as asthma, other lung diseases, heart problems, weakened immune systems, or other chronic illnesses.
7. The nasal spray version of flu vaccine was not effective and is no longer given.
8. There is no thimerosal in vaccines for the flu that we routinely give to children. Thimerosal is a preservative that was said to be linked to autism in the past. Multiple studies have shown that there is no actual evidence for that.
9. **YOU CAN'T CATCH THE FLU FROM THE FLU VACCINE.** The virus in the vaccine is killed. Most common side effects are mild discomfort at the injection site or a low grade fever, but it cannot give you the flu. Unfortunately the flu vaccine is given in the time of the year when many other viruses are present. If I had a nickel for everyone who said they got the flu from the vaccine, I would be truly a rich man. Studies prove the shot doesn't cause flu.
10. If you get your flu shot other than in your doctor's office, make sure that that information is transmitted by you to the primary provider's record in the office. Some pharmacies are better at transmitting the information than other.